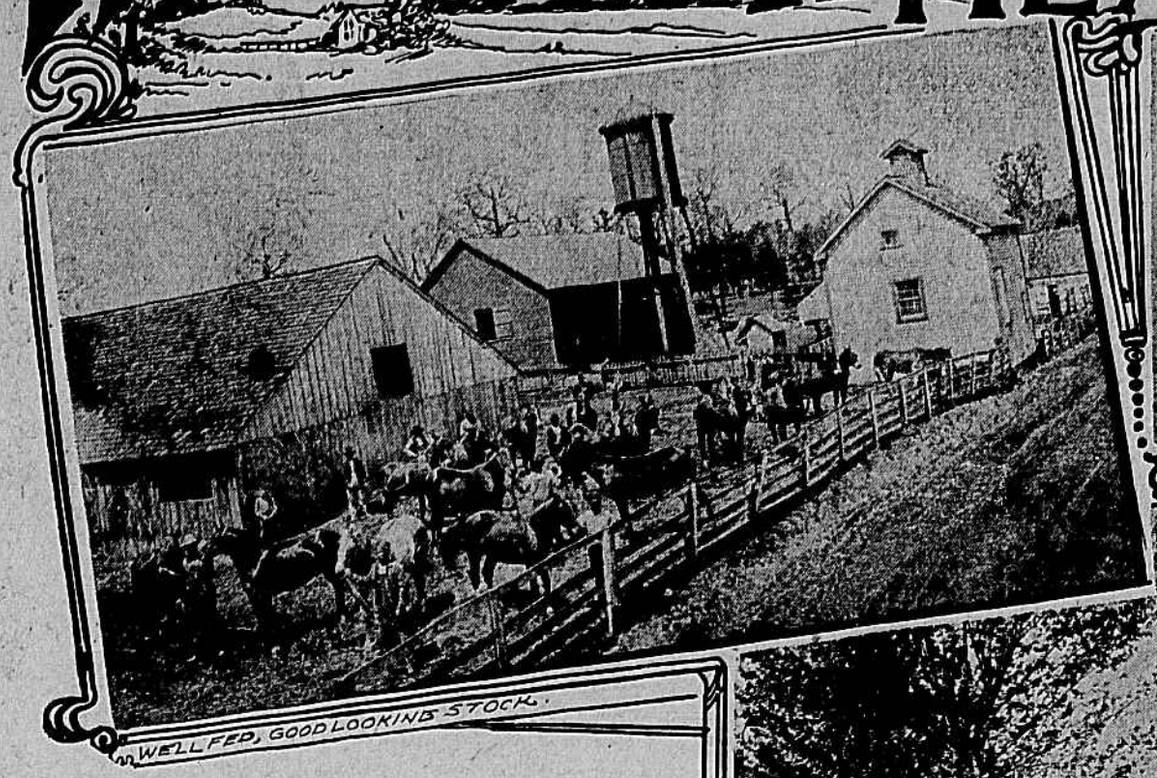
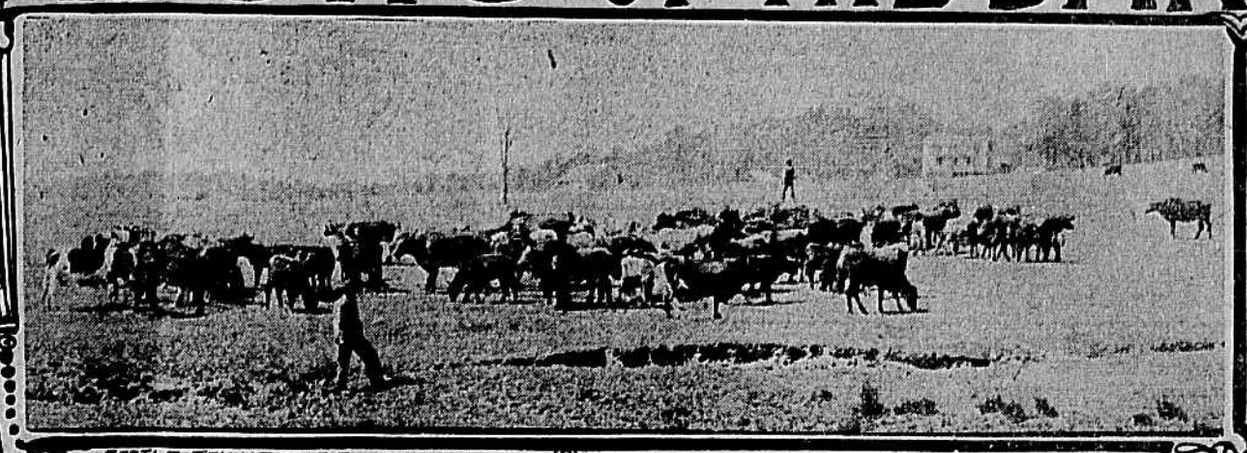
HISTORIC HOMESTEADS IN THE MEADOWS OF THE DAN



WELL FED, GOOD LOOKING STOCK.



CATTLE TAKING THEIR MEADOW MEAL.

VIEW OF FARM YARD AND STABLES AT WILLOW OAKS.

This is the first of a series of descriptive sketches of the beautiful and historic homesteads in the meadows of the Dan written by a special correspondent for the Sunday Times-Dispatch. Next Sunday's sketch will be on Windsor, the palatial home of Hon. S. H. Wilson.

THE Danville and Western Railroad, a branch of the Southern, leading out from Danville, runs over and along the line between Virginia and North Carolina for some distance, and at a point about twenty miles from the city named there is a dividing of the road, one branch for Spray, N. C., and the other to Martinsville and the apple orchards of Patrick county. This point is Leaksville Junction. A trestle here spans the Cascade Creek, so named by the illustrious writer of Westover, Colonel William Byrd. Two miles from this spot is the post-office, Byrdville, named in his honor.

As one crosses Dan River several miles below this Leaksville Junction on the Danville and Western, and goes on to Spray, N. C., he finds himself in the section which Colonel Byrd called the "Garden of Eden" when he made the boundary line between the two adjoining States. He writes with his inimitable force of how great the trees grew; what rich soil there was; the quantity of stone suitable for masonry that could be found, and cited one resource after another that would induce rapid settlement and make prosperity for this portion of the Dan's valley. The picturesque scenery enforced itself upon his mind, and he has left an interesting description of it. The little creek, then bolder than now perhaps, gurgled and rippled over the ledges of rock at Leaksville Junction and in the higher course of its stream, and suggested the name he gave—Cascade. In time a village grew on one of the hills overlooking its banks and took the same name, and has had the distinction of being one of the oldest places in this portion of Virginia, even older than the county seat.

Vast Stretches of Meadow.

Colonel Byrd made his survey in 1731, and soon afterward in his "History of the Dividing Line" made the before-mentioned description and prediction for the successful settlement of this land traversed by him. Could he stand to-day on "Imperial Heights," a homestead owned by a Spray company, or look from the back porch of Mr. T. B. Fitzgerald's residence, his pen would move as readily, or more readily, in describing this "garden spot" of cultivation. Vast stretches of perfectly level meadows spread out before the eye, adorned in green or gold with the newly grown crop or the ripened grain; the many streams of clear, pure water give a refreshing tone to the picture, while the wide levels of land are relieved by hills, covered yet with primitive oaks and pines. Immense herds of cattle are grazing here and there; the whirr of machinery falls upon the ear, and squads of laborers at different places attract attention, and the impression is made that the Creator is co-operating with the skill and industry of man to make the earth yield her increase to an hundred-fold.

Dan's Hill, seven miles from Danville, and Oak Hill and Windsor, further away, are imposing homesteads and plantations deserving descriptions; but this sketch relates to "Willow Oaks," the home of Mr. Thomas Benton Fitzgerald.

This was formerly "Cascade" plantation, named from Cascade creek, one of its boundaries. The Cascade plantation was settled by Robert Brodnax. He came from Brunswick county, Va., with Mr. Sterling Ruffin, the father of Chief Justice Ruffin, of North Carolina, when this estate stood in original forests. Mr. Ruffin climbed to the top of one of the tallest trees on the place and selected the site for the homesteady, this being partly built in 1817, and added to in 1827.

The history and lineage of the Brodnax blood are as clear-cut and good as any that gives pride and satisfaction to the old families of the Dominion, and a few facts concerning the name will not be out of place in this article.

This Robert Brodnax referred to, who married Nancy Wilson, of Dan's Hill, was a direct descendant of one Robert Brodnax, of Godmersham, Kent county, England, an estate of 10,000 acres now intact. This progenitor of the Brodnax name was a goldsmith to the crown, and a gold stock buckle made by him is a prized possession of Mrs. Rouhlac, a daughter of the sixth generation. His youngest son, William, born at Holborne, England, was the first immigrant of that family to America. He brought with him the oil portraits of his father and mother, the Brodnax coat-of-arms, a Bible and Prayer-book, which, with oil portraits of succeeding generations, are the most cherished belongings of the family. He married Mrs. Travis, of Jamestown, where he settled. They had three children. Their grandson, William Brodnax, married Sarah Jones, and settled at "Obscurity," in Brunswick county, Va., accruing to himself a large fortune by raising and selling fine horses.

The next generation included the first mentioned Robert Brodnax, the owner of "Cascade." During his life this Cascade plantation embraced 3,500 acres of land, and yielded one year, by the labor of its large number of slaves, 3,000 bushels of corn, 30,000 pounds of tobacco and a large crop of wheat and oats. Like most estates of this kind, it suffered a division of the property. Of the five heirs who lived to be grown, Mary Brodnax, who married her cousin, Dr. John Brodnax, of Petersburg, inherited Cascade. She died early, leaving two little girls, Mary and Nanny. Nanny married Mr. Austin Yates. She came into the possession of the residence and a small portion of land. Later this was bought of her by Messrs. T. B. Fitzgerald and the late F. X. Burton, of Danville, Mr. Fitzgerald afterwards becoming its sole owner.

The part of the estate owned and cultivated by Mr. Fitzgerald comprises about 800 acres, 450 of which are in constant cultivation. Other than its wide pastures, the remaining acres consist of valuable timber.

As one makes the entrance to the farm driving along the public road leading from North Carolina to Danville, it is seen at once that nature has done much for "Willow Oaks," the new name for Cascade plantation. At the right a beautiful wooded knoll rises majestically above the little creek, forced by farm labor to run in a prescribed course through the pasture, and on down through the lowgrounds into the river. The intervening meadow, and the blue grass gleaming under the big trees of the knoll, as a result of forest cultivation, give a foretaste of the extensive and entrancing view that greets the eye as one passes between the massive concrete gate-posts into the premises. Between this main driveway and the placid Dan, which skirts nobly around the southern border of the farm, lie the rich fields of corn, or wheat, or grass, divided into sections by roads in perfect condition and straight lines. This extent, by the hundred acres, of level land, always yielding some crop by its extensive cultivation, with its rest-places underneath wide-spreading willow oaks, like big umbrellas, so enraptures one as the view is taken in that the ascent to the house on the top of the hill is made almost unconsciously. The more extended view of this scene given when on the crest of this hill renders the landscape more pleasing. There is a sense of vastness and beauty and satisfaction in everything, and it is no wonder that visitors make their way, year in and year out, to get this view, and to see this noted farm.

So much for the setting nature has betowed, supplemented by improvements that come from a practical mind and judgment unsurpassed. When within the yard enclosures there is not the appearance of a farm at all. The granary, the mill, the blacksmith shop, the machinist's and manager's homes, the home of the hostler and the home of the gardener, the servants' quarters and tenant dwellings, besides the stables and other outhouses, are all arranged in streets, and a veritable town shows up in its garb of gray paint and frame construction.

Home of Spotless White.

The homestead is conspicuous, painted white, and constructed in broad, straight lines, affording ample room and a restful, striking appearance. It has four stories, including a spacious basement, with ten rooms on the second and third floors. There are inviting hallways and pleasant porches. The house has been recently remodeled and furnishing throughout on modern principles, having a full supply of hot and cold water and gas. Its most attractive features are its hand-carved wainscotings and mantelpieces and alcove window plans. Its substantial construction in the quality of material used and broad proportions suggest the way houses were built in the last century, while its tiled hearths and fireplaces give a touch of the modern finishing.

Everything about the place is made to last, from the wire fences which entirely enclose the farm down to its stone aqueducts and concrete water troughs.

Mr. Fitzgerald labors with the idea that man must be a benefactor to the next generation. He deems it wrong to wear out the land, to slay the beautiful forests and to work ruin for selfish ends. He believes in a just use of the land; to make it do its best by constantly improving it, and his farm is an open testimony to his convictions. The yield, restricted only by bad seasons, as a result of his wise insight and industry, is from fifty to seventy-five bushels of corn to the acre; wheat, from fifteen to thirty, and oats from thirty to fifty bushels, while hay runs from one and a half to two and a half tons to the acre. In addition to this profit from the soil, herds of Aberdeen, Angus and Shorthorn cattle, flocks of sheep and goats, and the best blooded hogs are raised. Chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese roam in droves. The horses and mules for work and driving are kept in fine order. The machinery, including a traction engine, a road machine, a threshing machine, and every necessary implement, is of the latest and best make.

Has Many Streams.

Dan River, Cascade and Dry Creeks and the numerous springs on the place make it one of the best watered farms in operation; in fact, one of its springs, by the use of a hydraulic ram, furnishes the water supply to the 10,000-gallon tank for household purposes and the stable yard.

White labor, as far as practicable, is employed, and mutual sympathy and respect exist between owner and operator, so that Willow Oaks is a source of happiness as well as a means of support to many. In appearance and reality it is an ideal farm, and deserves the comment so often made of being one of the most thoroughly equipped, best kept and productive farms in operation.

In other words it is a reflection of its proprietor, a man of unlimited resources of character; one who lives to benefit his generation in being a loyal supporter to the cause of Christ, a friend to the poor, and a helper in every worthy enterprise.

OMDURMAN: Queer Features of Life and Business in the Old Capital of The Mahdi: IN 1907

(Copyright, 1907, by Frank G. Carpenter.)

OMDURMAN.

OMDURMAN! The biggest native city of the Sultan! The capital of the Madhi and the Khalifa, and the future great commercial centre of this part of the world. I wish I could show it to you as I saw it while riding on donkey back through it with its Egyptian governor. It is one of the queerest cities of the world, and one of the most important to Africa of the future. Founded by the Mahdi, or the Mohammedan Messiah, and the scene of the most atrocious cruelties and extravagances of the Khalifa who succeeded him, it once contained about 1,000,000 of African Sudanese. It was then a great military camp, composed of 100,000 mud houses, and inhabited by tribes from all parts of the 1,000,000 square miles, comprised in the realm of that savage governor. The Khalifa forced the people to come here to live that he might have their services in time of war, and he allowed them to go home only to cultivate and harvest their crops, which they were forced to bring here for sale. He made Omdurman his seat of government, and he had his own residence here inside a great wall of sundried brick which inclosed about sixty acres, and in which was an open-air mosque of ten acres or more. Here the Khalifa had his palace and here he kept his 400 wives. Just outside here he had the great battle which ended in the destruction of himself and the city.

Omdurman in 1907.

The Omdurman of to-day is on the site of the great city of the Khalifa. It lies at the junction of the White and Blue Niles, in the bend where the White Nile flows into the main stream. By the course of the river it is about 1,800 miles from the Mediterranean Sea, and in a straight line perhaps an equal distance north of the Valley of the Congo. It is far inland from the Red Sea, and hundreds of miles from the source of the Blue Nile in the Abyssinian Hills.

The Omdurman of the present is laid out on practically the same lines as that of the past, and it covers almost the same ground, although it has much fewer people. During my trip I climbed to the top of the old palace of the Khalifa and took a look over the city.

The houses stretch along the Nile for seven or eight miles, with a thicket of boats upon the shore opposite where the Blue Nile flows in. Some of the town is on the main stream, and it reaches out from the river in every direction. It is a native city in every sense of the word. In its many thousand houses there are not a score which are of more than one story, and you can count the houses made of burnt brick on your fingers. It is a city of mud, pure and simple. The one-story mud houses have mud walls about them, and the mud stores face streets paved only with mud. The vast inclosures of the Khalifa are made of mud bricks, and the houses inside, which now form the quarters of the Anglo-Egyptian soldiers and officers, are of sunbaked dirt.

Standing on the Khalifa's palace, one can follow many of the streets with his eye. Some of them are of great width, but the majority are narrow and winding. The whole city, in fact, is a labyrinth cut up by the new avenues laid out by the British, with the holy buildings and the Khalifa's government structures in the centre.

Guided by the Governor.

I was shown through the city by the Mamour. All the towns of the Soudan have a British official who rules them; but under each such governor is a subgovernor, who must be a native Egyptian. This man is the real executive, as far as carrying out the orders of the government is concerned. He represents the natives, and understands all about them and their ways. The Mamour, with whom I went through Omdurman, is an ex-cavalry officer of the army of the khedivee. His name is Captain Ahmed Handy, and he fought with the British in their wars against the Khalifa. He speaks English well, and, as he understands both Turkish and Arabic, he was able to tell me all about the city as we went through.

I came down the Blue Nile from Khartoum in a skiff. The distance is about five miles, but we had to tack back and forth all the way, and the trip took over two hours. The Mamour met me on landing. He had a good donkey for me, and we spent the whole day in going through one part of the city after another, making the notes and taking the photographs which now lie before me.

Queer People These.

I wish I could show you the Omdurman natives. They are stranger than any I have seen in my African travels. They come from all parts of the Soudan and represent forty or fifty-odd tribes. Some of the faces are as black as a stove, some are dark brown, and others have the color of rich Jersey cream.

One of the queerest men I met during my journey was an African with a complexion as rosy as that of a tow-headed American baby and hair quite as white. He was a water-carrier, dressed in a red cap and long gown. He had two great cans on the ends of a pole, which rested on his shoulder, and he was trotting through the streets carrying water from one of the wells to his black Soudanese customers. His feet and hands were bare, and they were as white as my own. I stopped him and made him lift his red fez cap to see whether his hair was white by age. It was flaxen, however, rather than silver, and he told me that his years numbered only twenty-five. The Mamour talked with him in Arabic, and learned that he was a pure Soudanese, coming from one of the provinces near the watershed of the Congo.

He said that his parents were jet black, but that many men of his color lived in the region from whence he came. I stood him up against the mud wall in the street and had two Soudanese women, each blacker than the ink with which this paper is printed, stand beside him, and then made their photographs. The man did not like this at first, but when at the close I gave him a coin worth about 25 cents, he salaamed to the ground and went away happy.

Tribal Marks.

I am surprised at how many of these people have scars on their faces. Nearly every other man I meet has the marks of great gashes on his cheeks, forehead or breast, and some of the women are scarred so as to give the idea of terrible brutalities having been perpetrated upon them. As a rule, however, these scars have been voluntarily made. They are to mark the tribe and family to which their owners belong. The Mamour tells me that every tribe has its own special cut, and that he can tell from just where a man comes by such marks. The cuts are of all shapes. Sometimes a cheek will have three parallel gashes, and at another time you will notice that the cuts are crossed, while at others they look like a Chinese puzzle.

The dress of the people is strange. Those of the better classes wear long gowns, and are clad not unlike the Egyptians. Many of the poor are almost naked, and the boys and girls often go about with only a belt of strings at the waist. The strings are like tassels, and they fall to the middle of the thigh. Very small children wear nothing whatever.

Many of the women wear no clothing above the waist, and they seem to have no false modesty about the exposure of their persons. I saw one near the ferry as I landed this morning. She was a good-looking girl of eighteen, as black as oiled ebony, as straight as a string, and as plump as a partridge. She was standing outside a mud hut shaking a sieve containing sesame seed. She held the sieve with both hands high up over her head, so that the wind might blow away the chaff as the seed fell to the ground. She was naked to the waist, and her pose was almost exactly that of the famed "Vestal Virgin" in the Corcoran Art Gallery at Washington.

The Business Centre of the Soudan.

Omdurman is the business centre of the Soudan. Goods are sent from here to all parts of the country, and grain, gum arabic, ostrich feathers, ivory and native cotton are brought in for sale.

The town has one hundred restaurants, twenty coffee houses and three hundred wells. It has markets of various kinds, and there are long streets of bazaars or stores in which each trade has its own section, many of the articles sold being made on the ground.

One of the most interesting places is the woman's market. This consists of a vast number of mat tents or shelters, under each of which a woman sits with her wares piled about her. She may have vegetables, grain or fowls, or articles of native cloth and other things made by the people. The women have the monopoly of the sales here. Men may come and buy, but they cannot peddle anything within the women's precincts nor can they open stands there. I understand that the women are shrewd traders. Their markets cover several acres, and during my stay they were thronged with black and brown natives.

Not far from this market I came into the great square upon which the streets of the stores enter. This square contains ten or more acres. There are a number of restaurants facing it, and in one corner there is a cattle market, where donkeys, camels and horses are sold. The sales are under the government, to the extent that an animal must be sold there if a good title goes with it. If the transfer is made elsewhere the terms of the bargain may be questioned, and therefore the traders come.

Selling Money.

It is strange to have shops that sell money. I do not mean stock exchanges or banks, but real stores with money on the counters, and stacked up in bundles and laid away in piles on the shelves. That is what they have in Omdurman. There are caravans going out from here to all parts of north-central Africa, and each must have its own currency for the journey. These people are not far from the dark ages, as far as their financial matters are concerned. Many of the tribes do not know what coinage means; they use neither copper, silver nor gold, and one of our dollars would be worth nothing. Among many of the people brass wire and beads are the only currency, and, strange to say, every locality has its own style of beads and its favorite wire. If blue beads are popular you can buy nothing with red ones, and if the people want beads of metal it is useless to offer them glass.

In some localities cloth is used as money, and in others salt is the medium of exchange. The salt is molded or cut out of the salt rock in sticks, and so many sticks will buy a cow or a camel.

The owner of one of the largest money stores of the Sudan is a Syrian. I found him not far from the great market, and he told me that he would be glad to outfit me if I went into the wilds. I priced some of his beads. Those made of amber were especially costly.

He had one string of amber lumps five in number. Each bead was the size of a black walnut, and he asked for the string three English pounds, or about fifteen American dollars. The string will be worn as a charm about some woman's bare waist, and it may form the whole wardrobe of the maiden who gets it.

Among the Silversmiths.

Not far from this bead money establishment the Mamour and I entered the street of the silversmiths. This contains many shops in which black men and boys are busy making the barbaric jewelry of the Sudan. Jewels are the savings banks of this region, and many of the articles are of pure silver and pure gold. Some are very heavy. I priced rings of silver worth $5 apiece and handled a pair of gold earrings which the jeweler said were worth $60. The earrings were each as big around as a coffee cup, and their thickness at the place where they are fastened into the ear was that of a lead pencil. The man who had them for sale was barefooted. He wore a long white gown and a cap of white cotton, and his whole dress could not have cost more than $10. He was a black, and he had half a dozen black boys and men working away in his shop. Each smith sat on the ground before a little anvil about eight inches high and six inches wide, and pounded at the silver or gold object he was making.

In another shop I saw them making silver anklets as thick as my thumb, and in another they were turning out silver filagree work as fine as any from Genoa or Bangkok. The Mamour asked two of the jewelers to bring their anvils out in the sun in order that I might photograph them, and they kindly complied.

A little farther on we entered the shoe bazaar, where scores of merchants were selling red leather slippers turned up at the toes, and in a court not far away found merchants selling hides and leather fresh from the tanneries. They were salting the hides in the square, and laying them out in the sun to dry.

In the Manchester bazaar I found them selling cottons of many kinds and calicoes of gay patterns. There were but few American goods among them, and the chief importations were from England and Germany. I saw American sewing machines in the bazaar of the tailors, and I understand that they are generally used throughout the Nile valley.

During my stay in this section I bought some ostrich feathers of a merchant who sold nothing else. He had a large stock, and his prices were fixed. My feathers cost me about $2 apiece, but they are the long white plumes of the wild ostrich, and are far finer than any from South Africa, where the birds are reared upon farms.

In the Grain Markets.

A large part of the grain of the Upper Sudan comes down the Blue and White Niles to Omdurman. The grain markets are close to the river and they run for some distance along it. There is no rain here at this time of the year; hence there is no need for warehouses or sheds. The grain is poured out on the hard ground in piles and left there until sold. If you will imagine several hundred little mountains of white or red sand, with wooden measures of various sizes lying at their feet or stuck into their sloping sides you may have some idea of this Central African grain market. You must add the tents of canvas or mat shelters, in which the ebony merchants stay while waiting for their customers, and must make a crowd of black-skinned, white-gowned men and women moving about sampling the wares and buying or selling.